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AUTHOR Harris, C.
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ABSTRACT

This paper explains competency-based education and its positive and negative aspects. The author cites accountability, better instructional plans, and increased opportunity for student success as positive aspects. Problems mentioned include adjusting to new terminology and more record-keeping. Typical components of competency-based instructional models are listed as performance objectives, prerequisite experiences or skills, preassessment, instructional-learning activities, postassessment, and new performance objectives or termination. The author also briefly defines several other aspects of competency-based education, including development of a module, individualized instruction, scheduling, lesson presentation, recordkeeping, budgetary adjustment, increased assessment, teacher accountability, and minimum competency testing for graduation. He mentions how and why several of these and other aspects of competency-based education will require personal adjustments by students. In a concluding section, several related concerns still needing clarification are listed. (Author/JM)

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COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION--WHAT IT SPELLS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

by
Dr. C. Harris

A summation of a presentation during the Sixty-Fourth Annual Convention of the National Association of Secondary School Principals at Miami Beach, Florida.

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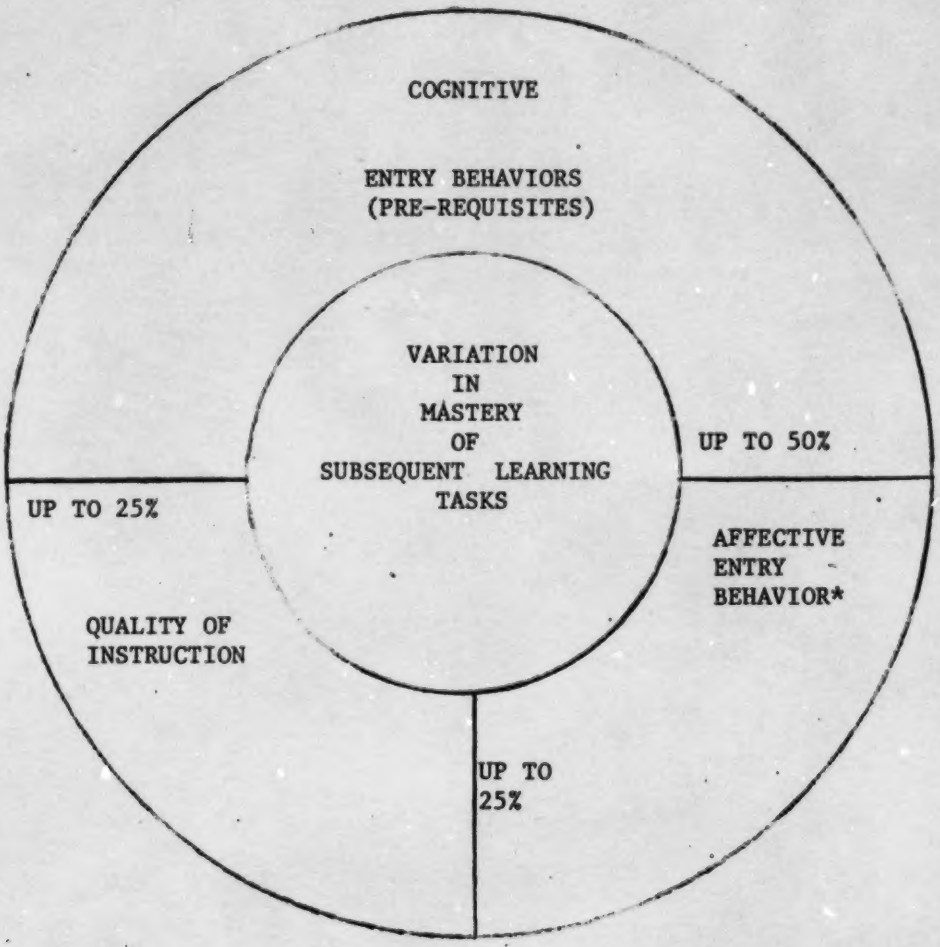
COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION--WHAT IT SPELLS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Competency-based education has caused much concern for the teacher and student during the past years. This educational concept has helped to generate a systematic plan for instructional management. The plan allows for instructional continuity and accountability. The continuity and accountability are a possible solution to the nationwide concern about the quality of education. Much discussion has been focused upon declining test scores and poor classroom performance. Competency-based education is proposed as a key for upgrading the quality of education.

Many of our students have experienced classroom learning failure due to the implementation of unacceptable instructional plans. Some of these plans have been association with rigid time limits for the completion of activities. This mode of thinking does not consider that all persons do not comprehend at the same rate. An instructional plan that has few time constraints is more desirable. This rationale reflects the mastery learning concept advocated by Benjamin S. Bloom and other educators. Table One depicts the concept of variation in mastery of subsequent learning tasks. (Feder, 1979, pp. 50-51)

TABLE I - VARIATION IN LEARNING TASKS



* 1. Self-concept
  2. Interest
  3. Motivation

The educational world no longer needs to stress that someone in a course must fail. It is not a sound practice to perpetuate the concept that grades for a given class must be in accordance with a normal curve. The normal curve concept implies that a small number of people enrolled in a course will fail, while the others will obtain an acceptable level of achievement.

However, a competency-based instructional management plan can be designed to allow each student to perform at an acceptable level. This means that it will be necessary to predetermine whether involved students are capable of mastering the learning task.

COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION AND THE TEACHER

Even though teachers have generally used the components of a competency-based instructional model, the transition in terminology, more recordkeeping, and other concerns have caused much anxiety.

Components of a Competency-Based Instructional Model - Many instructional models have been mandated by the State or Local School District. This indicates that the teacher might or might not have been involved with the development of the model. However, a model must be understood by the teacher if there is to be success. Many of the competency-based instructional models have from three-to-six components. Typical components are:

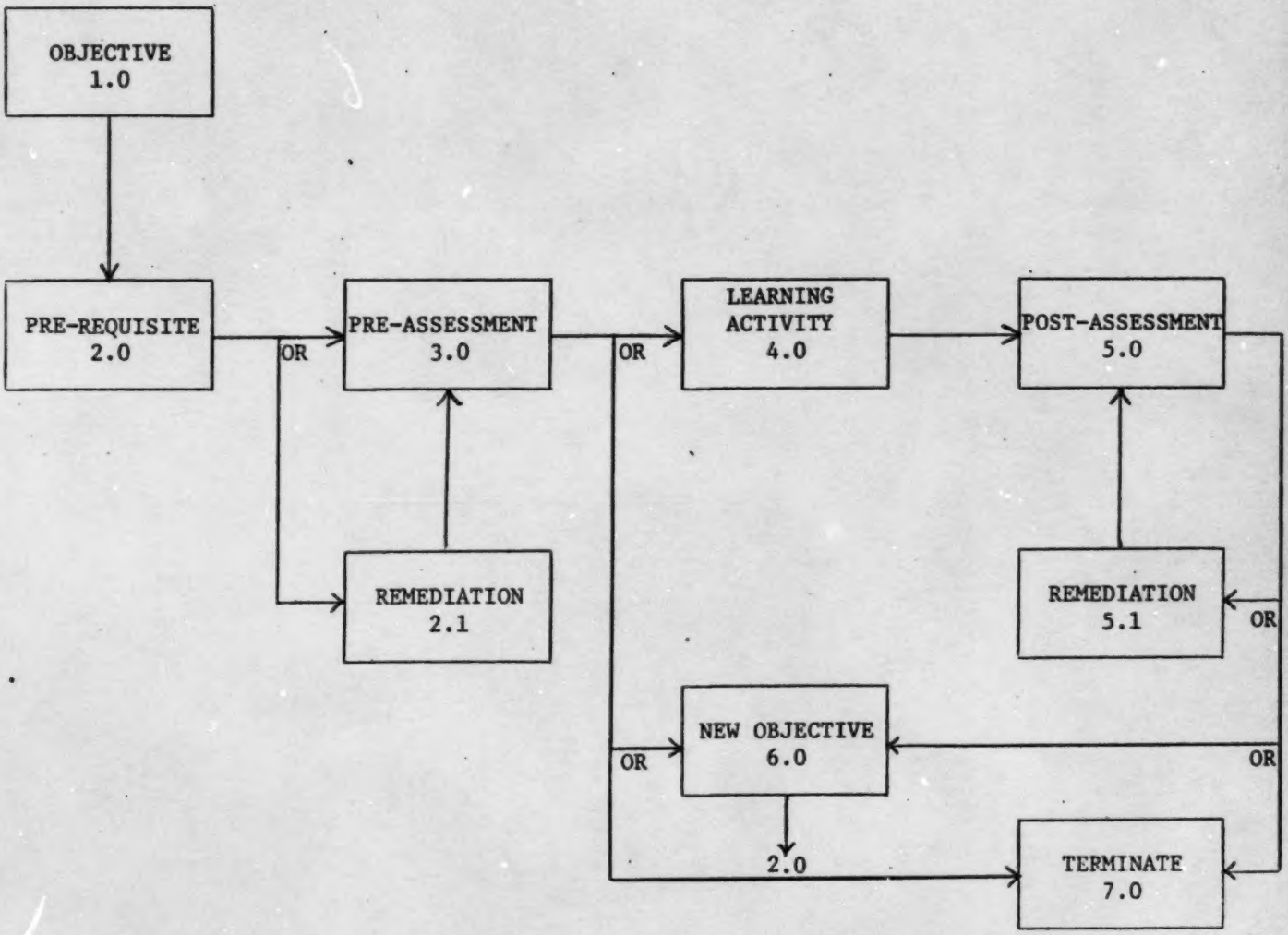
1. Performance Objective - A statement of the behavior that should be demonstrated, the condition under which evaluation will occur, and the criteria of acceptance or performance standard for the behavior have been considered a performance objective. In many instances, teachers have been able to equate the new terminology with past objective statements.
2. Pre-requisites - The experiences or skills the student must have had before a new competency can be learned. In the past, there has not been a systematic way to determine the validity of pre-requisites; therefore, a teacher can best use the pre-requisite for advising students and parents of possible course difficulty if the requirement is not met. Until there is additional validation of pre-requisites, remediation can be provided for those demonstrating a lack of perceived skills.
3. Pre-Assessment - An evaluation of what the learner already knows about the objective is known as pre-assessment. The development of assessment

instruments is a great concern for teachers since it helps to determine the instructional level for students.

4. Instructional-Learning Activities - Tasks designed to help the learner master a competency is known as instructional-learning activities. The development of a variety of activities is a major concern for teachers. Activities should allow students to complete competencies at an individualized pace. A description of the interaction between teacher and student needs to be outlined. The varied learning styles must be addressed.
5. Post-Assessment - The implementation of a plan designed to provide proof that the learner has mastered the competency is known as post-assessment. Post-assessment is administered after participation in instructional-learning activities. Students assessed to be non-masters of a competency are scheduled for remediation. Once proficiency has been demonstrated, the student is to be validated as having completed the task. Observation of behavior, oral questions, a finished project, or written tests are a representation of possible assessment methods.
6. New Performance Objective or Termination - A learner can elect to go to a new objective or terminate a program after the successful completion of a post-assessment. Table Two demonstrates the relationship of competency-based instructional components.

Development of a Module - The planning of small units of instruction can allow the teacher to plan for individualized instruction. The units of instruction become critical for the teacher if individualization of instruction is relevant. A module can relate to one or more objectives.

TABLE II - CBE INSTRUCTIONAL MANAGEMENT MODEL



Individualized Instruction - A plan for each student to learn independently of classmates is called individualized instruction. The strategy requires the planning for a variety of learning activities. In addition, class size will need to be reduced and/or clerical support will be needed.

Scheduling - More flexibility in the teacher work schedule is needed to allow for student remediation. One possible mode of flexibility is to schedule teachers to provide support in an instructional learning center. An additional adjustment would be the scheduling of students for the center when an instructor is available with expertise to match the needed remediation.

Lesson Presentation - Large group presentations will not be appropriate for individualized instruction since all students will not need information at the same time. The teacher must establish a procedure for providing small groups and/or individual presentations.

Recordkeeping - Competency-based instruction requires keeping a record on all phases of the instructional model during implementation. This is an additional concern for the teacher since it is necessary if there is to be instructional validation.

Budgetary Adjustment - The planning for alternative learning activities requires adjustment in budgetary priorities. The implementation of an instructional model for the first time will also infer the purchasing of additional materials.

Increased Assessment - Pre and post-assessments are associated with each competency. This places an additional burden on the teacher for the development and updating of evaluation techniques.

Teacher Accountability - The responsibility for implementing the instructional plan and assisting with program development is a teacher accountability. In addition, there is now a discussion of whether a teacher should be required to take a com-

petency test.

Minimum Competency Testing for Graduation - The minimum competency testing concept which was initiated in Oregon, Florida, and California during the mid-seventies has now been recognized by all states. An article in the Education Digest reported in 1978 that at least thirty-three states had some form of statewide minimum competency standards and the other seventeen are considering minimum competencies for graduation. (PIPHO, 1978, pp. 5-7)

This means an additional adjustment for the teacher and student. The teacher must monitor the completion of minimum competencies by students and encourage the continuation of performance if requirements are completed before graduation. The latter is critical since many plans only require performance at the eighth grade level.

Many of the constraints placed on the teacher by the implementation of competency-based education are also shared by the student.

COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION AND THE STUDENT

Just as teachers must make adjustments to the instructional model, students are also confronted with a need to make personal adjustments.

Competency-Based Instructional Model - The implementation of competency-based instruction means that the student must be able to identify instructional components and determine the procedure to be followed after completing each component.

Assessment - The pre and post-assessment for each objective will require a student to adjust to the idea of reaching a specific level of achievement before continuation with a new objective.

Working at an Individualized Pace - Students will need to become acquainted with the concept of not having to wait on fellow classmates before getting new assignments and/or for other students not having to wait before starting new assignments. Students will be competing against a criterion instead of each other.

Accountability for Learning - The student must become responsible for following the instructional management plan initiated by the teacher. Following the plan means that the student is assuming some learning accountability.

Minimum Competency Testing for Graduation - Students cannot expect to automatically get a diploma after completing twelve years of schooling. There appears to be at least a trend to have a student demonstrate proficiency at the eighth grade level in writing, reading, and mathematics. The assessment for these skills are initiated at varied times during the years of schooling. Students who are not able to pass the competency test before reaching the twelfth grade can experience great anxiety. The latter situation has led to suits being filed as a protest against minimum competency testing. There are also those students who will complete the minimum

requirements long before the twelfth year of school. This will necessitate a decision of whether early graduation or other course options are to be considered.

Grading System - Students will be competing against a criterion instead of each other. Students must remember that the best performer in a class is not insured of earning an "A" for the course.

Scheduling for Remediation - A competency-based instructional plan allows for remediation during the instructional process. This implies possible schedule adjustment for students at any time there is not a mastery of learning.

Actually, the student and the teacher share many of the same concerns when competency-based education is involved.

SUMMARY

Competency-based education as it is known today represents almost two decades of discussions. However, there is still a need for much discussion and field testing. Some concerns that still need clarification are:

1. What is the role of the teacher and student with competency-based education?
2. What is the role of the State and Local School District with competency-based education?
3. Should a student be required to pass a competency test before high school graduation?
4. Should additional funding be provided for implementing competency-based instruction?
5. Should teachers be required to pass a competency test?

Competency-based instructional components, individualized instruction, scheduling, recordkeeping, budgetary adjustments, lesson presentation, assessment, and accountability are concerns that the teacher and student must consider. In addition, minimum competency testing has focused on skill areas to be tested, grade levels to be covered, and procedures for test development. The testing has been required by State Departments and Local Districts with little financial consideration for implementation.

Competency-based education has provided for improved instructional continuity and accountability. However, the future of quality education is still a major concern.

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